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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes and compares two 1994 reports on the state of higher education in developing nations, the World Bank's "Higher Education: The Lesson of Experience" and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) "Policy Paper on Change and Development in Higher Education." It examines the assumptions, diagnosis, and prescriptions of each report, noting that both stress the importance of linking higher education with economic development, an important role for government, the building of policy consensus among the various stakeholders in higher education, and institutional reform and autonomy. While both reports stress the importance of linking higher education with economic development, the UNESCO document is clearly much more optimistic in its expectations that higher education can face more complex demands in the social, cultural, and economic spheres. In the World Bank report it is noted that universities should adapt to a competitive market situation, whereas the UNESCO report underlines a more complex idea of institutional adaptation to various demands. Whereas the World Bank report states that basic education should be the priority of developing nations, the UNESCO report refuses this kind of tradeoff within the educational sector, the paper concludes. Contains 10 references. (MDM)

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TWO POSITIONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION: THE WORLD BANK AND UNESCO

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Introduction

In the mid-1990's the policy debate on higher education, in Latin America and in other regions of the world, has moved to the international arena. Multilateral lending organizations, such as the World Bank has spurred debate with its 1994 publication, *Higher Education: The Lesson of Experience*. The Inter-American Development Bank has shown renewed interest in the issues surrounding higher education in Latin America with a meeting of Rectors held last year. UNESCO has been active in promoting international debate, first with the publication (with the Economic Commission for Latin America) of *Educación y Conocimiento: Eje de la Transformación Productiva con Equidad* and, most recently, with its recent policy paper on higher education. The Conference of Rectors of the European Community has been promoting the discussion of common issues with Latin American rectors through the Columbus Project. In the context of NAFTA, trilateral discussions between Canada, the United States and Mexico have taken place in the educational sphere. The MERCOSUR has also placed educational issues on its agenda. Since the early part of the decade, the Ford Foundation has supported a research effort to think about higher education policy in Latin America, headed by José Joaquín Brunner, which produced *La educación superior en América Latina: Agenda de problemas, políticas y debates* (Brunner et al, 1994). A specific instance of internationalization in the policy debate is the fact that, since mid-1994, the OCDE has sent two groups of experts to Mexico to inquire and report on science and technology policy and on higher education policy (OECD, 1994).

There is clearly an international ferment in this area. What is its significance? What agreements and disagreements are emerging? I would like to address these issues by looking comparatively at two documents on higher education policy that are now in circulation: the World Bank's study and UNESCO's recently published *Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education*. The World Bank publication explicitly deals with the developing countries, whereas UNESCO purports to cover higher education generally. However, the UNESCO document is full of specific references to the developing world. It is fair to say that both organizations have expressed specific positions concerning higher education in developing countries.

The following is an attempt to compare these positions based on:

1.- Their assumptions: what values and presuppositions seem to underlie each position?
2.- Their diagnosis: How does each organization conceptualize the current crisis in higher education?
3.- Their prescriptions: What does each position recommend for reforming higher education?

1. The Assumptions

True to form, the WB produced a *research report*, followed by policy proposals. The document has the structure of an academically sound policy proposal, in that it is documented (mostly with the World Bank's previous papers on higher education) and backed up with quantitative data and an extensive bibliography.[1] It depends heavily on the experience of various governments in the reform of higher education, and in this sense it is very close to a monograph on *best practice* in higher education policy (Olsson, 1995). Its perspective is that of the political economist, whose main concerns would be the efficient use of public resources in a framework of effective policy making.

There is no doubt that, apart from being a lending organization, the World Bank is also a formidable research institution that takes pains to back up its proposals with documentary and empirical investigation carried out by specialists[2] and consultation with various groups in governments and higher education institutions. This lends a special force to *Lessons of Experience*, in that it provides an internally coherent and tightly argued conceptual approach with specific recommendations for higher education policy.

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[1]. Reimers points out that most of the cited references are papers produced by the World Bank and that little use is made of available research on comparative international education (Reimers, 1995).

[2]. A conversation with Claudio de Moura Castro provided this insight.

UNESCO produced a *policy document* that is also based on previous research[3]. Additionally, the paper is the product of debates and agreements reached among member countries. It contains a diagnosis and a series of proposals that have circulated among various publics. Unquestionably, its value lies partly in the extensive consultations among governmental officials, academics and NGO's involved in higher education in many countries that preceded it. It purports to be a *shared platform of ideas and a general conceptual framework*. There is an explicit concern not to present a rigid blueprint but a general orientation for policy makers who must operate in diverse national and regional settings. It attempts to address a diverse audience: institutional leaders and managers, academics, national policy makers and international organizations. Therefore, there is an explicit attempt to reach people with differing outlooks.

The UNESCO document attempts to be a contribution to the current debate on higher education and, most specifically, an argument for renewed support for higher education. Its central focus deals with the *mission* of higher education, the *recent trends* and the *challenges* for the future. Its basic outlook is *educational*, meaning that it principally asks questions about the educational and social value of higher education. It quite evidently represents an answer to the World Bank monograph, a different point of reference for the international policy debate.

Their conception of the functions and utility of higher education

It seems that the World Bank is of two minds regarding higher education. On the one hand, it recognizes that higher education investments are important for economic growth, because of the raise[sic] individual productivity and the long-terms economic returns to basic research and technological development. Economic growth, in turn, is a critical prerequisite for sustained poverty reduction in developing countries, which is proclaimed as the overarching objective of the World Bank. However, the monograph hastens to point out that, within the education sector,

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[3] Two of the back-up studies are: Alfonso Borrero, *The University as an Institution Today* (1993, UNESCO/IDRC) and Thorsten Husén, *The Role of the University: A Global Perspective* (1994, United Nations University/UNESCO).

investments in higher education have lower social rates of return than those in primary and secondary education and that investments in these levels have a more direct impact on poverty reduction. Thus the main priority of the Bank will continue to be basic education, whereas its involvement in higher education will be guided by calls for equitable and cost-effective financing, so that "primary and secondary education can receive increased attention at the margin." (p. 12) Therefore, cost-sharing and the promotion of private higher education would help to free up scarce public resources for improving basic education. An additional rationale for this policy would be to induce countries to adopt policy reforms that would increase efficiency and lower public costs of higher education.

In the eyes of the World Bank, higher education is simultaneously a basic social institution and a *problem* for governments. It recognizes that public higher education is here to stay, but it recommends forcefully that further enrollment expansion should take place in the private sector, as long as government regulation takes care of the issue of equity and proper information for the higher education market.

Given its economic analysis, this is a relatively skeptical view of higher education. Universities in developing countries are not expected by the World Bank to tackle fundamental and complex problems of contemporary society. They are more likely to be considered successful if they adapt well to aiding economic growth and do not weigh terribly much on public budgets. Because of the World Bank's overriding interest in basic education in developing societies, it concludes that a realistic assessment of the budgetary possibilities of these countries would put higher education on the back burner in terms of government funding. As we shall see, this does not imply that governments should pay little attention to higher education. Quite the contrary.

For UNESCO, higher education is seen, not as a burden on public finance, but as a long term social investment in productivity, social cohesion and cultural development. The improvement of higher education is seen as a means for strengthening the goals of *sustainable human development*. "Without a satisfactory system of higher education and research, no country will achieve a degree of progress in which economic development occurs with due consideration for the environment and in which a *culture of peace*

emerges based on democracy, tolerance and mutual respect." (p. 13) Its vision of the basic functions of higher education includes both the support for economic development and the general value of knowledge production and cultural development, including institutional autonomy and intellectual freedom. It especially points out the important influence that a well-functioning higher education sector can have on raising quality in basic education.

2. Their Diagnosis: where are the main problems?

The starting point for both positions is that higher education today is in crisis. Both papers agree that the current situation is not sustainable in the medium and long term.

For the World Bank, higher education is in crisis throughout the world because "in all countries, higher education is heavily dependent on government funding. In an era of widespread fiscal constraints, industrial as well as developing countries are grappling with the challenge of preserving or improving the quality of higher education as education budgets are compressed. The crisis is most acute in the developing world, both because fiscal adjustments have been harsher and because it has been more difficult for developing countries to contain pressures for enrollment expansion."(p.2) The crucial problems the Bank points out are:

- *Quality:* rapid enrollment growth under conditions of limited resources has contributed to lower quality.
- *Inefficiency*: public resources invested in higher education are not well used, dropout rates are high, program duplication is endemic and a large share of public budget is used for noneducational expenses.
- *Equity*: "public subsidies as a proportion of unit costs of higher education often far exceed the subsidies to primary and secondary education; because students in higher education tend to come from the higher-income groups, a large publicly funded higher education system tends to have adverse effects on income distribution."

Higher education is also perceived as a management problem for institutional leadership and a problem for governmental regulation. The concern for institutional reform points to a crucial issue in higher education in contemporary Latin America, and there can be no doubt that without serious attention to the institutional level -- that is, management, leadership, the use and accountability of public resources, etc. -- little progress can be expected in higher education reform. In most Latin American countries, governments are only now beginning to grapple with the issues posed by the World Bank, whether they are loan recipients or not. High costs, lack of regulatory frameworks and an absence of policy vision on higher education systems are real problems in many Latin American nations.

The UNESCO document starts by stating, "we have witnessed the extraordinary development of higher education and we understand its vital importance for economic and social development. However, higher education is in crisis in all countries of the world. Enrollments continue to grow but public funding diminishes; and the gap between the developed and developing countries countries to widen in the higher education sector . . . Therefore higher education must reformulate its mission, it must develop new perspectives and it must establish priorities for the future."

UNESCO points out three important trends that stand out in recent transformations experienced by higher education systems all over the world. The first is enormous quantitative expansion, which has nonetheless not led to increased equality of access within countries and within major regions. Additionally, expansion has not resulted in a proportionally large production of engineers and scientists[4]. After the first burst of growth, enrollment expansion in developing countries has slowed considerably in recent years.

The second trend is diversification in terms of types of institutions, academic programs and students. Institutional structures and forms of academic organization have gone through profound changes. However, the emergence of new types of institutions has not necessarily meant that they represent

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[4]. Except for countries such as Korea and Taiwan.

optimum adaptations to expansion in terms of quality and equity: many institutions do not comply with minimum standards in this regard and the creation of new institutions has not always led to significant educational innovations in terms of adapting to changing labor markets and technological development.

The third trend is that expansion has taken place in an increasingly constrained financial environment: spending per student has not kept up the pace with the growing numbers of students enrolled. UNESCO sees this as a major part of the explanation of declining quality. However, a difficult paradox becomes evident: developing countries, especially the poorer ones, spend an increasing proportion of their GNP on each student in public higher education than developed nations. Therefore, problems are evident in the sources of funding and the mechanisms through which resources are allocated to higher education. UNESCO states that no country can sustain a viable and differentiated system of higher education on purely public funds.

3.- The prescriptions

The basic prescriptions made by the World Bank for higher education are:

- Encouraging institutional differentiation, especially developing the private sector

- Diversifying fundings sources, including cost-sharing with students and linking government funding closely to performance.

- Redefining the role of government in its relationships with higher education.

- Focusing on quality, responsiveness and equity.

The rationale for institutional differentiation is that the traditional model of the European university, with its one-tier program structure, has proven expensive and inadequate in the developing world. More differentiated systems, including private and nonuniversity institutions can help meet growing demand and make higher education more responsive to labor market needs.

With respect to funding diversification, the World Bank acknowledges that public institutions will continue to educate a large share, if not the majority, of students in most countries. But it recommends that the role of the private sector be strengthened and that most *new* enrollments be channeled into this sector. If public institutions are to achieve higher levels of quality and efficiency, "sweeping reforms" in financing are called for. This would mean: encouraging greater private investment, financial support for qualified students who lack funds, and incentives for greater efficiency in the allocation of public resources. Achieving this would require linking funding to performance and therefore abandoning the tradition of negotiated budgets in public institutions.

Therefore, the role of government would have to be redefined. There is a clear *economic* justification for continued state support of higher education, says the World Bank, because investments generate long-term returns to basic research and technology transfer and because imperfections in capital markets curtail the ability of individuals to borrow adequately for education. However, in most developing countries "the extent of government involvement in higher education has far exceeded what is economically efficient" (p. 9). The current crisis is stimulating change in government involvement to ensure a more efficient use of public resources: "Rather than direct control, the government's responsibility is becoming that of *providing an enabling policy environment for both public and private higher education institutions* and of using the leverage of public funding to stimulate these institutions to meet national training and research needs efficiently." (ibid.) The World Bank's review of successful implementation of reforms points to:

(a) The establishment of a coherent policy framework. More differentiated higher education systems require a well-defined legal framework, consistent policies and a vision by policy makers for the system and each type of institution. It also requires the creation of oversight bodies with the capacity to monitor institutional performance, analyze policy, evaluate funding requests and make relevant information available to the various stakeholders in higher education.

(b) Greater reliance on incentives and market-oriented instruments to implement policies.

(c) Increased management autonomy for public institutions. Decentralization of all key management functions (setting fees, recruiting and retrenching personnel, using budgetary allocations flexiblely across expenditure categories) is a sine qua non for successful reform. But institutions need to be held accountable using sophisticated evaluation criteria.

The main purposes of such efforts would be to emphasize quality, responsiveness and equity. Raising quality would require improving secondary schools and the selection process for higher education, developing high-quality and well-motivated teaching staff, guaranteeing sufficient pedagogical inputs, and establishing the capacity to monitor and evaluate quality of training and research outputs through institutional self-evaluation and external assessment.

Increasing the responsiveness of higher education to labor market demands would imply business participation in governing boards of institutions, the creation of financial incentives for joint industry-university research, corporate-sponsored internships for students, and part-time academic appointments for professionals from the productive sector.

Achieving greater equity of participation through preferential admissions policies for low-income ethnic minority and female students "will not adversely affect quality if overall selectivity is high, if remedial assistance is available, and if concomitant efforts are made to increase the average quality of secondary education. Ultimately, equity cannot be achieved in higher education unless women, low-income youths and other disadvantaged groups have access to good-quality public education at the preschool, primary and secondary levels." (12)

As for UNESCO's prescriptions, rather than specific recipes for reform, they make up a general platform. The social and political context for higher education poses new types of challenges for higher education. Political democratization, economic globalization, regional trade agreements, social and regional polarization, exclusion of various social groups, and cultural fragmentation are, according to UNESCO, the main elements in an increasingly uncertain and dynamic environment. Higher education is called on to think about the consequences of these processes on its own mission and operation. Special

mention is made of the growing *knowledge gap* between developed and developing nations.

UNESCO recognizes -- with the World Bank -- that the existing structures and practices in higher education must be changed. Accepting the challenge of sustainable development would imply that institutions of higher education take a hard look at themselves in terms of their relationships to the economy, their organizational structures, and their funding and spending mechanisms. To accomplish UNESCO's expectations of global social and economic reforms, it recommends fundamental transformation at both the system level and at the institutional level in higher education.

The principal imperative that nations face today, according to UNESCO, is raising their capacity to adapt to rapid changes in their economic, technological, political and cultural environments. Developing countries, in particular, face the dual challenges of developing their human resources and reducing existing levels of poverty. Thus, institutions of higher education and research are seen as important factors in development policy. UNESCO points to the need to prepare for *massive higher education systems of high quality.*

Three principles underlie UNESCO's proposals for change: relevance, quality and internationalization.

a) UNESCO's definition of greater relevance includes the following:

- Restructuring teaching & research in order to meet the needs of the economy but also to develop ethical values and a spirit of civic participation in democratic processes

- Using public funds efficiently and being accountable to society through better management, while maintaining the principles of autonomy and academic freedom (which, UNESCO warns, must not used as a pretext for resisting public accountability); evaluation systems are seen as mechanisms for improvement, not as means of financial control;

- Higher education must also demonstrate its relevance to society by interacting positively with other levels of the educational system.

b) Raising quality would mean:

- Reforming the curriculum and teaching practices, especially in the direction of multidisciplinary studies, the use of modern educational technology and the introduction of flexible study programs that would allow for more intense collaboration with industry as well as lifelong education;

- Developing research in higher education is an indispensable factor in economic development, in raising the quality of higher education in general and in gaining public respect;

- Reforming the personnel policies of higher education institutions, with special emphasis on raising the level of competency needed in hiring and promoting teachers;

- Evaluating secondary school leavers and reforming secondary school;

- Investing in institutional infrastructure.

c) Internationalizing higher education is important for UNESCO for the following reasons:

- Promoting international cooperation in order to support institutions in poor countries, helping to reduce the growing educational and scientific gap between developed and developing nations;

- Promoting intercultural understanding through increased exchange of teachers, students and researchers among different countries;

- Crucially, cooperation would help reverse institutional decay in less developed nations, where institutions must learn the value of effectiveness and of developing closer ties with local communities.

Special emphasis is placed by UNESCO on the issues surrounding government funding for higher education, which is conceived as a long-term investment for society rather than a burden on public finances. It points out that funding sources must be diversified; but cost-sharing with students has social and political limits, and it warns against excessive commercialization of higher education. UNESCO stresses that, given its status as a public good, no substitute will be found in the future for government funding of higher education, and it disapproves of using a limited concept of rates of return to basic and higher education as a guide for funding policies. Therefore it calls for increased public and private investment that would allow for a renewal of enrollment growth.

A lesson of experience for UNESCO is the significance of institutional diversity for the health of academic communities, for knowledge development and the preservation of national and local cultural identity. In its experience, the uncritical adoption of models is harmful for higher education, which must strike a balance between the universality of knowledge and the specificity of local needs.

Conclusions

The World Bank is interested in poverty reduction under conditions of economic adjustment, whereas UNESCO is interested in sustainable development. Both stress the importance of linking higher education with economic development. However, UNESCO is clearly much more optimistic in its expectations that higher education can face more complex demands in the social, cultural and economic spheres. *Lessons of Experience* basically expects universities to adapt to a competitive market situation, whereas the UNESCO paper underlines a more complex idea of institutional adaptation to various demands in the environment, from giving access to specific social groups to developing environmentally sound technology. Whereas the World Bank states that basic education is the priority, UNESCO refuses this kind of tradeoff within the educational sector.

The way they look at social institutions and the questions they ask of education are different. A fundamental difference lies in the question of values and attitudes surrounding higher

education: scepticism versus optimism; the exclusively economic value of higher education versus its multidimensional nature.

Now, are there any points in common? A closer look shows many compatible proposals. The following table sets out these commonalities. UNESCO and the World Bank take as the starting point their definitions of the current crisis in higher education. Both call for an important role for government. In its defense of the long term role of the state, the World Bank is even more forceful and specific than UNESCO. They concur in the importance of building a policy consensus among the various stakeholders in higher education. Both emphasize the need for institutional reform in higher education, and they agree that autonomy and decentralization are key elements in reform.[5]

I want to stress these points in common because, I think, they touch on central themes that go beyond the debate on education. The redefinition of role of the state, the need to build policies by consensus and, especially, the urgency of reforming public institutions in Latin America -- from the judiciary and municipal management to the education system -- are issues that are increasingly coming to the fore. The question now is not so much "reducing the state and expanding the market" as it a question of building a *more capable state* (Grindle, 1993). This theme is clearly present in both the World Bank's and UNESCO's papers and it has also been stressed by other recent analysis of higher education policy in Latin America (Brunner et al.). The redefinition of the role of government in its relationships to higher education and the need for a clear long term policy strategy, as stressed by the World Bank, are issues that should not be avoided by governments and stakeholders, whether or not one agrees with other themes posed by *Lessons of Experience*.

Another unavoidable issue that both positions mention is change at the institutional level. Decentralization, autonomy and effective management are stressed as essential ingredients of higher education reform. Once again, this theme is in tune with a broader discussion of public sector reform in Latin America. The need to develop more competent and legitimate public institutions in general -- from the judiciary and municipal

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[5] Several of these points are brought up by Reimers (1995).

management to the educational system -- has been pointed out as intimately connected with economic reform (Naím, 1995; Rubio, 1995).

From this perspective, the higher education papers by the World Bank and UNESCO touch on crucial issues in educational and social reform in Latin America. Their disagreements are healthy and their commonalities are revealing. These issues need more open and systematic debate in Latin America for educational reform to gather strength. It may be said that the World Bank and UNESCO have made contributions by consolidating and developing significant arguments that may become useful inputs for such a debate.

The Basic Issues in Higher Education Reform: World Bank and UNESCO

Issues	*World Bank*	*UNESCO*
Need for a policy framework: redefine the role of government	Specific, coherent, heedful of financial and political constraints: more private funding; evaluation; use of financial incentives	Less specific, but emphasis on funding diversification, institutional autonomy with accountability, evaluation.
Enrollment expansion	Not a crucial issue; growth through the private sector	Growth is necessary to reduce inequities
Institutional reform	The traditional model of university must change: institutional autonomy with accountability; efficient management.	The traditional model of university must change: institutional autonomy with accountability; efficient management; relevance to local needs; adaptability to changing environment.
Basic goals	Quality, relevance and equity [defined in economic terms]	Relevance, quality & internationalization [defined in social & cultural terms]
The roles of higher education	Mainly economic and technological	Wider notion of social, cultural and economic functions
Regard for local diversity	Build policy consensus locally	Develop stakeholders and build consensus locally
Institutional differentiation	Through the private sector	Through nonuniversity and private sectors
Research and the international *knowledge gap*	Government should support science as a public good	R&D are crucial for institutional reform, economic development & interregional equity
Teaching and curriculum	Improve quality of teachers and incoming students	Curricular reforms, flexible methods, improve quality of teachers

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